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## Belfast Study Center Newsletter

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*Queen's University Belfast – the host institution for CIEE in Belfast, Northern Ireland*

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### **Halfway through our Studies**

*Dr Ray Casserly*

Hello and welcome to the second CIEE Belfast Center newsletter of Fall 2012.

This edition of the CIEE Belfast newsletter has two components, the first being this document and the second is a [video](#) we have uploaded to Youtube.com. This video can also be found on the Belfast study centre Facebook.com page ([click here](#)).

At the time of writing the CIEE students in Belfast have already participated in their first overnight weekend fieldtrip. During this trip students explored some of the infamous sites in Dublin and Drogheda including visits to cultural and historical sites relating to the religious division in Northern

Ireland, Irish Independence, the Irish Civil War, and the social rise and fall of a post-independence Ireland. On Saturday morning the students arose bright and early to catch to 6.50 am train from Belfast to Dublin. Having departed from the train in Drogheda, some 40 miles north of Dublin, the students embarked on their first CIEE excursion in the Republic of Ireland. Drogheda, an ancient town tracing back to the Norman invasion of Ireland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was the starting point of the fieldtrip as it was the site of an epic siege (and subsequent massacre) by Oliver Cromwell in 1649. The town is also nearby the UNESCO World Heritage site, Newgrange.

Newgrange is a 5,000 year old passage tomb, making it older than Stonehenge in England and the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. Built during the Neolithic age by a farming community, Newgrange has become synonymous with the establishment of a unique Irish, or Celtic, narrative. CIEE students learned from the site the symbols associated with the Irish Celtic identity and how these are appropriated by communities in Northern Ireland today.



The visit to Newgrange was followed by a visit to the Battle of the Boyne heritage center. The Battle of the Boyne took place in July 1690 between the Protestant King William and Roman Catholic King James. Although both of these kings were laying claim to the throne of England their civil war was fought mostly in Ireland. As a result of King Williams's victory the Protestant establishment in Ireland was guaranteed their preferential position in Irish society, leading to centuries of sectarian hostilities.

The following day students visited the award winning museum and tour of Kilmainham Gaol (or jail). Kilmainham Gaol was founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to revolutionise the penal system in Ireland as it moved from an ideology based on punishment to one of punish and reform. Kilmainham Gaol provided the students with access to some of the most complex and politically difficult aspects of contemporary Irish history, as well as an insight into the treatment of the common Irish person during the British control of Ireland prior to 1922.



On the same day the group visited the War Memorial at Islandbridge. This was part of the recent historic visit by H.M. Elizabeth II during the first visit of the British head of state to the Republic of

Ireland since the partition of Ireland. This site presented the students with a view towards coping with difficult histories as this site based near Dublin's city centre is a memorial garden for all those who fought and died on behalf of the British forces in both World Wars. Traditionally, Irish nationalism has been reluctant to accept the input of Irish people to the British forces, regardless of the conflict. However, in light of the peace process a new approach is being taken by both communities and their respective national Governments.



The fieldtrip came to its conclusion after an exclusive CIEE historical, sociological and anthropological walking tour of Dublin's city center, taking in infamous sites like the GPO, St. Stephen's Green, Fusilier's Arch, O'Connell Street, Ha' Penny Bridge, Temple Bar, Grafton Street, Moore Street and Henry Street. Students not only learned about the historic significance of the 1916 rebellion, the 1919 Anglo-Irish War of Independence, and the 1922 Irish Civil War; students also learned, witnessed, and discussed the current social and economic status of Dublin and the Irish Republic.

If you wish to see more photographs from the trip, and some student comments about the CIEE experience, please go to our [CIEE Belfast Facebook](#) webpage.

Ray Casserly Ph.D